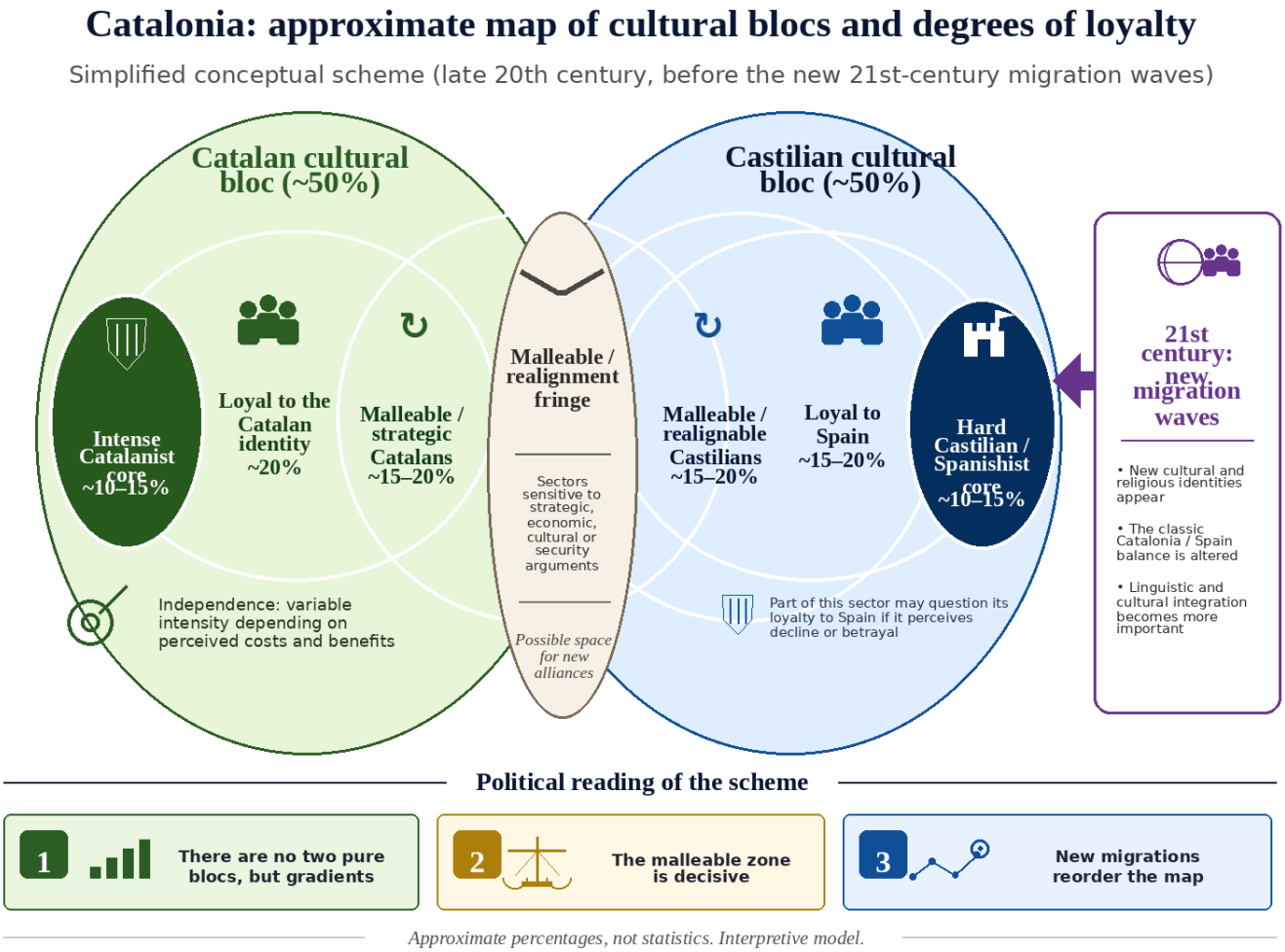
The shades of Catalonia and the new national alliance


Catalonia: approximate map of cultural blocs and degrees of loyalty
Simplified conceptual scheme (late 20th century, before the new 21st-century migration waves)
Catalan cultural bloc (~50%)
Intense Catalanist core ~10–15%
Loyal to the Catalan identity ~20%
Malleable / strategic Catalans ~15–20%
Independence: variable intensity depending on perceived costs and benefits
Malleable / realignment fringe
Sectors sensitive to strategic, economic, cultural or security arguments
Possible space for new alliances
Castilian cultural bloc (~50%)
Malleable / realignable Castilians ~15–20%
Loyal to Spain ~15–20%
Hard Castilian / Spanishist core ~10–15%
Part of this sector may question its loyalty to Spain if it perceives decline or betrayal
21st century: new migration waves
• New cultural and religious identities appear
• The classic Catalonia / Spain balance is altered
• Linguistic and cultural integration becomes more important
Political reading of the scheme
1 There are no two pure blocs, but gradients
2 The malleable zone is decisive
3 New migrations reorder the map
Approximate percentages, not statistics. Interpretive model.

Between black and white there are shades of grey. And when speaking about Catalonia, understanding those shades is not moderation: it is understanding where a national battle can be won.

For much of the late 20th century, Catalonia was structured around two major cultural matrices: a culturally Catalan population and a culturally Castilian population. They were not perfectly closed blocs, but they were two sufficiently recognisable worlds: language, family memory, loyalties, symbolic references and relationship with the territory.

After Francoism and the major migration waves from the rest of Spain, Catalonia was divided, more or less, between those two poles. A culturally Catalan Catalonia and a culturally Castilian Catalonia. The second did not arrive without its own culture: it brought the Castilian language, Spanish memory, its loyalties and its national reflexes. And that culture, installed massively in a historically Catalan territory, inevitably competed with the country's own culture.

But the decisive point is that within each bloc there are degrees.

On the Catalan side there is a core of maximum national intensity. One may call them fanatics, if one wishes, but the term should not be understood here as an insult. On the

contrary: every nation that wants to survive needs a minority of maximum intensity, a vanguard that does not negotiate what is essential, that is not ashamed to exist and that does not apologise for defending the country's continuity. They are the Catalans who do not merely want to speak Catalan, but want Catalonia to remain Catalan. Those who do not merely want a comfortable autonomy, but a sovereign nation. Those who understand that without conflict there is no preservation.

That hard Catalanist core is not a problem: it is a moral reserve. It is what prevents the nation from becoming folklore, a museum or a mere regional administration.

Around that core there is a broader fringe of Catalans culturally loyal to Catalonia. People who live Catalan as their own language, who understand Catalonia as a nation and who, in principle, sympathise with independence or with strong sovereignty, even if they are not always willing to assume all the costs of political confrontation. They are loyal, but not necessarily combatants.

Then there appears a more malleable zone: Catalans by culture, language or environment who may oscillate depending on circumstances. They may support independence if they perceive economic benefit, collective dignity or a historical opportunity; but they may cool off if the price rises too much. They are not the spiritual centre of the nation, but they are part of the Catalan field.

On the other side something similar occurs, though not symmetrically. There is a hard Spanishist core, often hostile not only to independence, but to Catalonia's very cultural reality. It is the person who lives in Catalonia but despises Catalan, ridicules the territory's own culture and turns coexistence into a form of moral occupation. The "fucking Catalans" or the "Catalonia is an invented nation", said from within Catalonia, summarises this political pathology better than any theory: living in a country and not only hating the culture that makes it recognisable, but denying it even the condition of a nation.

Alongside that core there is a culturally Castilian and Spanish-loyal fringe, but not necessarily an aggressive one. It does not identify nationally with Catalonia, does not see Catalan as its own language and does not feel part of a Catalan nation, but it does not necessarily experience every expression of Catalanness as a provocation. It is sociological Spanishism, inherited and environmental.

Then comes the most interesting fringe: the culturally Castilian but politically malleable population. People who, because of family, language or environment, would never have considered adopting Catalonia as their preferred national identity, but whose attachment to Spain is not sacred either. Their Spanishness is practical, inherited and comfortable. As long as Spain appears strong, orderly and protective, they will remain there. But if Spain is perceived as decadent, surrendered, incapable of defending anything and transformed into a machinery of dissolution and exploitation of the periphery in which they live, that loyalty may begin to break.

There lies the crack.

The old Catalonia of the 20th century could be explained, in simplified terms, as a tension between Catalanness and Castilianness. But 21st-century Catalonia introduces a third factor: new migratory, religious, linguistic and community identities that no longer fit within the old Catalonia-Spain axis.

And that completely changes the game.

It is no longer only a question of whether Catalonia will be Catalan or Spanish. It is a question of whether a recognisable Catalonia will continue to exist, with its own language, cultural continuity, symbolic authority and capacity to integrate without committing suicide.

Here a decisive paradox appears: part of the culturally Castilian population may end up feeling betrayed by Spain. Because Spain no longer offers greatness, continuity, order or protection. Spain, from the moment it is born as a modern Bourbon state, is already crooked: centralising, artificial, decadent, hostile to its internal nations and destructive even of Castile, the nation that usurped the Hispanic Empire. It does not save Castile: it uses it. It does not integrate Catalonia: it tries to neutralise and dissolve it. And in its current phase it does not protect the culturally Castilian people of Catalonia from a new social fragmentation either.

Spain has become a structure that no longer defends even what it claims to represent.

That is why some Castilians in Catalonia may begin to ask themselves: what sense does it make to cling to a Spain that no longer defends anything? What sense does it make to remain loyal to a political nation that surrenders itself to demographic, cultural and moral dissolution? What sense does it make to keep obeying an identity that no longer protects language, order or continuity?

In that void, Catalonia may appear as a refuge.

Not for everyone, obviously. Not for the hard Spanishist who needs to deny Catalonia in order to affirm himself. But it may do so for culturally Castilian sectors that can discover that Catalonia, precisely because it has a language to lose, a history to defend and a threatened existence, is more credible than Spain as a project of continuity.

Catalan credibility is not born of comfort. It is born of conflict. Catalonia is a nation of frontier, of its own language, of historical resistance and of affirmation against external powers. And, moreover, it has a historical credibility against Islam that Spain cannot claim in the same way.

Spain cannot do so because Spain, as a modern state, is born with the Bourbons, long after the foundational war against Islamic power in the peninsula. Contemporary Spain is a late, centralist and decadent state construction. Catalonia, by contrast, has a genesis much more directly linked to the frontier against Al-Andalus. Its historical formation is understood through the March, the Carolingian frontier, advance, repopulation and the affirmation of its own Christian space against the political Islam of its time.

Catalonia is genetically —in the sense of genesis, of origin— an anti-Islamic nation, because its historical birth is tied to resistance against a political civilisation that occupied the south and marked the country’s foundational frontier. Catalonia cannot be understood without that frontier. Spain, by contrast, turns that history into a common myth when it suits it, but lacks the same genealogical clarity: because modern state Spain is Bourbon, later, artificial and decadent.

That difference matters.

When today one speaks of political Islam, religious communitarianism, parallel neighbourhoods, cultural norms incompatible with Western freedom or demographic pressure on small nations, Catalonia can speak with more authority than Spain.

And to that historical credibility one can add current political credibility. Figures such as Sílvia Orriols have occupied a space that old Catalanism abandoned: that of a Catalonia that does not merely want to free itself from Spain, but wants to continue existing as Catalonia.

Language, order, security, cultural frontier, demand for integration and rejection of national substitution. Whether one likes it or not, that discourse responds to a real anxiety that autonomism, progressivism and official independence politics have preferred to deny.

But there is an even greater taboo: mass Latin American immigration.

Spain cannot speak clearly about this because it contradicts itself. Hispanism needs to present Latin American immigration as a natural extension of Spain: same language, supposed cultural community, sentimental “brotherhood”. That is why, for Spain, mass Latin American immigration is much less symbolically problematic than other immigrations. It interprets it as an expansion of Hispanidad.

For Catalonia, by contrast, the effect can be lethal.

Because mass Spanish-speaking immigration, even if it comes from America and not from Spain, reinforces the same historical problem: the linguistic and cultural substitution of Catalan by Spanish. It may be an immigration closer in religion, customs or Western codes than others —but even that has a limit: let’s not go too far—, but from the Catalan national point of view it worsens the basic imbalance: more Spanish, more pressure on the Catalan language, more difficulty in making Catalan the common language, more ease for Catalonia to become just another Hispanic region.

Here Catalanism can also become a refuge against mass Latin American immigration. Not against each concrete person because of his or her origin, but against the political effect of a Spanish-speaking mass that, if not assimilated into Catalanness, accelerates the social disappearance of Catalan.

This is what Spain cannot say. And this is what Catalonia must say.

For Spain, the Spanish-speaking Latin American can be seen as Hispanic continuity. For Catalonia, if he or she does not adopt Catalan and loyalty to the country, he or she may become another factor of national substitution. Not because that person is morally worse, but because he or she arrives already installed in the dominant language against which Catalonia has resisted for centuries.

For that reason Catalanism must not limit itself to denouncing political Islam. It must also denounce demographic Hispanisation, even when it comes wrapped in Latin sympathy, music, popular Christianity or rhetoric of brotherhood. The Catalan nation does not disappear only through religious shock. It can also disappear through simple linguistic flooding.

And here the possible unexpected alliance returns.

Part of the culturally Castilian population of Catalonia may see that Spain has betrayed it. That the Spanish state does not guarantee order, does not guarantee cohesion, does not guarantee the prosperity and welfare of the working classes, does not guarantee continuity and does not even guarantee a strong idea of itself. It may discover that hard Catalanism, which it may once have seen as an enemy, is the only project that still speaks of limits, belonging, language, cultural authority and future.

It is not a matter of these sectors becoming romantic Catalanists overnight. It is that, faced with dissolution, they may prefer a strong Catalonia to a rotten Spain. They may understand that a Catalan Catalonia offers more order, more proximity and empathy towards the native class, more identity and more defence of the territory than a Spain that merely administers its own decadence, as it has always done.

The new dividing line will no longer simply be Catalans against Castilians. That was the old frontier of the 20th century. The frontier of the 21st century will be another: those who want a Catalonia with form and those who accept a Catalonia without form.

A Catalan Catalonia, with its own language, cultural authority and will to continuity.

Or a Catalonia turned into a transit territory, a cheap labour market, collapsed social and public services, infrastructure at its limit, insufficient housing, a Hispanic periphery, a communitarian mosaic and a soulless administration.

There everything will be decided.

The Catalanism to come must understand the shades of grey, but not in order to dissolve itself into them. It must understand them in order to reorganise the national field. It must know how to distinguish between the irreducible enemy and the possible ally. Between the hostile Spanishist who hates Catalonia and the disenchanted Castilian who may prefer a strong Catalonia to a decadent Spain. Between the immigrant who accepts being Catalan and the one who merely comes to reproduce another community inside the country. Between integration and substitution.

The conclusion is uncomfortable, but clear: Catalonia can become a national refuge even for some who were never Catalanists. Not because Catalanism moderates itself, but because it hardens. Not because it renounces its most intense core, but because it turns it into a compass. Not because it hides its history, but because it claims it.

Catalonia has something Spain no longer has: a concrete cause.

It has a language to save. It has a nation to preserve. It has a frontier memory. It has a historical credibility against political Islam that is not born of propaganda, but of its own genesis. It has an objective reason to distrust all non-assimilated mass immigration, including Latin American immigration, because it knows that every non-Catalanised linguistic mass pushes the country towards disappearance.

And it has, above all, a question that Spain no longer knows how to answer:

What do we want to continue being?

If Catalonia answers clearly, even some old adversaries may end up understanding that the only identity capable of ordering the future is not the Spanish one, but the Catalan one.

Because when everything dissolves, whoever still defends a form becomes a refuge.

And Catalonia, if it dares to be Catalonia, can be that refuge.